

The Buccaneers

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Don C. Seitz



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THE BUCCANEERS



The Buccaneers *Rough Verse*

By Don C. Seitz

*With frontispiece
and decorations by
Howard Pyle*

*" . . . of Schooners, Islands and
Maroons and Buccaneers . . . "*
—Robert Louis Stevenson



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TO
WILLIAM WIRT KIMBALL
REAR-ADMIRAL, U. S. N.

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THE BUCCANEERS



Invitation

Come to the wide gray sea,
Ye who are brave and free!
Come to the Rover's aid,
Ye who are unafraid!

This is the life to live,
Ye who have lives to give;
Here where the reckless bold
Garner the coward's gold!

Ne'er such a harvest field—
Nowhere so great a yield—
Here on the wide gray sea.
Come, ye bullies, follow me!

Credo

We drive our trade with the burnished blade,
With pistol, powder, and ball—
Necks in the halter, none dare to falter—
It's conquer or chuck it all!

Oh, it's heads you lose and tails we choose
In the double game we propose;
The yard-arms cant with a ready slant
To welcome the running noose!

So the debt is paid for the wager laid
'Tis the worst with us that's well—
To pay for the right to a ready fight
With a thousand years in hell!

When Henry Morgan Sails

Ho! Henry Morgan sails to-day!

The trumpet summons the volunteers.

Hear it blare across the bay,

Sounding a call to the Buccaneers!

Reeling they come down the Kingston
street,

Villains of deepest sort—

Babble o' tongues and curses meet

At the gateway of the port.

Ruck and riff of every land

From Hull to the Barbary Coast,

Pistol in belt, dagger in hand,

Ready for any man's boast.

Rallied for risk and red rapine,

Fleeing from gibbet and cell,

Ragged, scarred, haggard, and lean,
Hot on their road to hell!

Who's to care if none return?
The fewer the better, we say!
More spoil and splendor they will earn
Whose comrades lose their way!

Ho! Henry Morgan sails to-day
To harry the Spanish main,
With a pretty bill for the Dons to pay
Ere he comes back again!

Porto Bello

Nine armed sail from Port Royal Bay
Creep down to the Spanish main,
To loot and ravish and dearly reap
The spoils of the King of Spain.

The shores are steep and the towers strong,
But little or naught care they;
The golden lure is a certain cure
For the dangers that bar the way.

So all ashore to the stiff assault
'Gainst cannon and arquebus ball;
Silver and women for those who win,
And perdition for those who fall!

'Neath showers of shot and boiling oil
The priests and the cowering nuns
Carry the ladders to make the breach
Food for the merciless guns.

Crimson rivulets redden the tide
That flows in the yellow bay—
Bay of the name of God not now—
Bay of the devil this day.

It's over at last, the castle falls,
They die who have dared defend:
Greed and vengeance collect their price,
And death is the common end.

With blade at throat and pistol at heart
The proud old governor stands,
Rather to die than yield his sword
To such scoundrelly outlaw hands.

Wife at right and daughter at left,
Their pleadings are in vain—
Mercy's not the Buccaneer's creed:
He tumbles with the slain.

The drunken beasts in the gutters roll,
Or wallow in wine and gore:

Fifty good men could finish them,
But the men are here no more!

The hive destroyed, the ships creep back
Into Port Royal Bay.
With rum and cards in Kingston town
The wastrels have their day!

Panama

Twenty leagues of jungle and hill,
Torrent and tangle bind the way
Across the Isthmus of Panama
From Nombre de Dios Bay.

But there's treasure ahead with a town to sack—
Think of this, ye rogues who would fain turn
back!

Halt! None retreat! When Morgan leads,
Danger is something no one heeds!

They die in their tracks who seek to flee
From perils, unless by his decree!

Have they hoofs and horns? By our damned
souls! no!

They're driving wild cattle to face their foe!

Ho! what a jest! The bulls are but beef—
A meal that's needed by every thief!

Here's smoke and flame to add to the
zest—

The cowardly creoles have fir'd their nest!

Too late for saving their jewels and cash,
So quickly our rascals have made the dash

From sea to sea! Across the world
Death and destruction swiftly hurl'd

'Gainst the old city! 'Tis a hundred years
Since Drake's drum fell on their startled
ears!

Pack the spoil and back on the road!
All he can carry, each man's load!

Ransoms are met in silver and gold
For women and children, young and old.

Prisoners must pay or endure their fate—
Morgan measures mercy in pieces of eight.

We straggle again to the Eastern shore,
Never with Morgan to sail the more!

*Ho! what adventure equal to this
Since Hernan Cortes burned his ships
And left the world behind?*

Maracaibo

Neck o' the bottle tightly corked,
An' we all shut up inside;
Three Spanish ships athwart the pass
That leads to the ocean wide.

The fortress shows its iron teeth—
With big guns grinning along the
shore—
Surrender the fleet! The signals spell:
Henry Morgan is trapped once more!

Our cunning Captain tries to buy
A road to the open sea;
But bargains hard the Dons would drive,
So we fight to set us free.

Against the Castile Admiral
We send a fiery ship;
[13]

With bombs and flame we bring him shame
And cause his flag to dip.

Three against one are fearful odds,
Tho' nothing for odds care we;
They sink and ground till none remain,
But the gate's still shut to the sea.

Now a trick on the Spanish dogs
Our cunning Captain planned,
Debarking men in open boats
To tackle the fort on land!

Crowded they row to the muddy shore;
Back empty they seem to go—
The crews are tucked beneath the thwarts,
And the same pull to and fro!

Then guns are turned from the seaward side
To meet the assault on shore—
So danger departs from the narrow strait
And Morgan is free once more!

With a trumpet's toot and a mocking hoot
We sail past the toothless hold,
All hands aboard with scratchless skins,
Our pockets stuffed with gold!

The Adventurers

We are the men who widen the world;
We sail 'neath a flag that's never furl'd.
Storm and shine are the same to we
Who seek our fortunes over the sea!

Face toward risk and back against home,
We welcome peril where'er we roam;
With hearts unafraid and hands on steel,
We drive our way with a throbbing keel!

Reefless our sails in the eager search,
Leaving the weaklings to lie in the lurch!
Heedless we live and lightly we die
For the wealth we give our souls to buy!

We the daring who open the world,
Who sail 'neath a flag that's never furl'd,
Who laugh with scorn at the angry sea
And challenge fate whatever it be!

William Dampier

Swart sailor of the Seven Seas—
 Bold marker of the trail,
Who left behind the lands of ease
 With seldom shortened sail.

From silver shores to golden isles
 Across the unknown main,
Waylaying galleons 'tween the whiles
 And taking toll from Spain!

The Jolly Roger waves apeak,
 With skull and cross-bones drear:
The powder's short, the ship's aleak!
 What cares the Buccaneer?

With steadfast eyes he views the skies,
 Fearless of God and man;

Black as the night his banner flies—
Escape him, ye who can!

“Pieces of Eight,” early and late,
Is the chant of the wolfish crew.
Daring for plunder every fate
While finding a world that’s new,

Looking for wealth on the ocean range,
Reddening the emerald sea,
Blood for jewels in fair exchange
Give the Brotherhood of the Free!

Only a plank ’twixt life and death,
Tossed on the great South Sea!
Blade o’ cutlass out of its sheath
The warrant for things to be!

Gallows and stake and musket ball
Are wages of those who fail!
There’s many another ready to fall,
And plenty o’ more to hail!

Riot and rum and a brief delight
Are the most that the pirate wins;
Life o' strife and follow and fight
Till he pays in full for his sins!

But charts are laid and paths are made
Where ships in peace may run!
The road is clear for honest trade
When Dampier's work is done !

Basil Ringrose

Laden with spoil and straggling back
From a foolish raid on San Pecaque,

The Spanish horsemen ride them down,
Taking price for loot of the town!

Laying about with lance and whip,
Cutting off retreat to the ship!

Among the killed, relates Dampier,
Was Basil Ringrose, the Buccaneer—

“My ingenious friend” who wrote last year
“Of Captain Sharp” and sailed in the fear

That he would starve in London City—
So good a fellow, more’s the pity!

Sailors should stick to the sea, say I—
They bungle on land whatever they try!

Deodand

When a wolf dies, the pack divides
 His carcass among the band;
So it is with a Buccaneer
 When his goods are deodand.

Empty his chest upon the deck!
 Let's see what the fool's been saving:
A pack of cards, an extra shirt,
 And a kit of tools for shaving!

Here's something more in secret store:
 A ringlet of dusky hair—
A portrait, too, of a little girl—
 The knave had a heart somewhere!

Juan Fernandez

Sulky and sullen,
Dour and Scotch,
Sandy Selkirk
Refuses his watch.

Set him ashore
With the goats and seals,
Flintlock and powder,
To hunt for his meals!

He can gnaw the rocks
When his shot gives out—
The pig-headed, shirking,
Lubberly lout!

The Great Galleon

Millions of pesos in her hold,
Silks and spices precious as gold.

Half a thousand men in the crew—
Soldiers and seamen, gallants a few.

A score of priests and a dozen nuns,
Saying their matins between the guns.

Crowded from deck to the deep-down keel,
Armed to the teeth with cannon and steel.

She lies in the water logy and low,
The Manila ship for Acapulco.

Hawks of the sea, the adventurers lie
In ambush, waiting her sails to spy.

They've come half around the world and more
To filch the treasures from Philip's store.

Anson's one ship battered and sere—
Her seams part open, and hard to steer.

A famished band in a rotten bark
To make a stand 'gainst the Spanish ark!

Never much of a crew at the best,
Storms and scurvy finished the rest.

Now in a flutter of hopes and fears
The flag of the galleon great appears.

Named for a saint and sent in her care,
The perils of ocean and pirate to dare.

Sore need of a saint! Now Anson slips
And starts the battle between the ships.

Leaves his last anchor: in desperate straits
They fight the foe, while the hangman waits.

Hope behind: if their venture fail,
Never a man again will sail.

The drums are beat and the masses are said
For the souls of the Spaniards ere they're dead!

It is saving time, as the fight turns out—
Nuestra Señora surrenders in rout!

The millions are ours—the silks and the gold!
Our fortunes are made in the galleon's hold!

The Flying Proa

The Ladrones flit between the isles

In a singular sort of a boat:

Swift as the breeze she measures the miles,

A cockle-shell dancing afloat.

Ropes of coir and sail of bark,

She shuttles across the sea:

Swift and sure they build this ark

From the trunk of a cocoanut tree!

Rigged lateen and low in the foam,

She never is sent about;

In the eye of the wind she makes for home,

This racer both frail and stout.

Six leagues an hour is easy sail

In the trade-wind's cheery blow—

Ere the gun can crack she's out of hail

And safe from our poky Snow.

Pierre le Grand

Pierre le Grand in an open boat

Put out from Tortuga to seize—

With thirty comrades, scarce able to float—

The first ship to come on the breeze.

High and dark, a Spanish bark

Crested the foaming tide:

Strong at their oars the pirates hark

And lay themselves 'longside.

While they grapple the chains in a silent grip,

The doctor with auger and brace

Bores holes in their craft; they leap to the ship—

She vanishes, leaving no trace.

“They come from the sky!” scream the terrified
crew,

Who are prisoners e'er they can think,

Clapped in the hold, the many by few,

And their wine we merrily drink!

Roll-Call of the Rogues

Wash the decks!

Send the dead to their graves

Down with the sharks in the dancing
waves!

Call the roll of the Rogues!

Let's know what it cost

For this beggarly prize—

An hour of battle and twenty stout lives!

Call the roll of the Rogues!

Line up on the deck,

All ye who can stand,

Bearing a blade or pistol in hand!

Call the roll of the Rogues!

Look over the lot

Whose lurking lives

Are spent in the trade where plund'ring
drives!

Call the roll of the Rogues!

Now all are here!

In shortest rhyme

We'll see who the devil excused this time!

Call the roll of the Rogues!

“One-Eyed Pete and Maltese Joe,
Who killed the woman long ago—
He's done worse since, so never mind:
This isn't a calling that makes one kind!

“Bristol Bill and Mike the Mouse,
Turtle Dick and Jemmy the Louse—
Four fine samples of forecastle thieves
Off to the Pit, while no one grieves.

“Gold-Coast Sam and Krooman Jack,
Snakes from a slaver, stalwart and black—
Scar-Fac'd Will and Dublin Hugh,
Both show you had work to do!

"A split in the skull marks Jimmy Legs,
And Ten-Dollar Joe for the doctor begs:
Take turn with the rest, you Portugee!
While the medico mends poor Harry Lee!

"Some have real names, the rest forgot
Who bore them long ere it fell their lot
To sail with a Pirate; now names are few,
And almost any call will do."

What's the use going on?

Enough are alive
To help a black-flag cruiser thrive!
End the call of the Rogues!

Walking the Plank

Walking the plank is a short parade,
A ready road out of life.
The step to the end is easily made,
So take it and raise no strife!

Life's but a toss for a bit of gold—
You've lost your throw, we've won!
The water is green as grass on a grave;
Make the leap and begone!

The die was cast with loaded dice,
You knew your fate before.
No use to plead, death is decreed—
A splash, and 'twill all be o'er!

It's cool and quiet beneath the wave
Down in the sparkling sea;

A ripple or two and bubbles a few,
And your troubles will cease to be!

They tell no tales who walk the plank,
The pirate no tale-bearer owns;
Tilt the board on end, and quickly send
The tattler to Davy Jones!

The Auto da Fe

Feel Fil Fol Fum!

They smell the blood of an Englishman!

Caught in the fight and kept in jail

By the Holy Inquisition,

Now tied to a stake

In a circle of brands,

Awaiting their ignition!

Not a saint he! Not he, indeed—

Only a Corsair in desperate need,

Who looks his last on the world to-day,

While the mumbling friars watch and pray!

Pray for a soul that was long since lost,

Waving before him the sanctified host!

Chanting the *Miserere* in sing-song Latin,

Saying the mass for the dead as a matin!

Cap of a fool on his shaven head,
Decked with devils dancing in red,
Garbed to his feet in a yellow gown,
Gaped at and hooted by all the town!

A flash of the match, and flames ascend,
Curling about the body they rend;
A cry and crackle together resound
While the smoke cloud rises above the ground!

So goes aloft the Pirate's soul
'Mid pious hopes for a better goal—
Better by far than in life it earned—
"Saved" by the prayers it always spurned!

Tortuga

Mounseer Bertran d'Ogeron

Comes from the King of France
To rule the Isle of Tortuga:
He's in for a merry dance!

To rule the Isle of Tortuga
Is not an easy chance.
The King of Spain has tried in vain—
Here's luck to the King of France!

Kings of the Isle of Tortuga
Are we who rule the main;
Nothing to us but feathers and fuss
Are Kings of France and Spain!

The sudden sword and the heavy hand
Are crown and scepter here
In this our Isle of Tortuga—
Naught else of Kings to fear!

The Bull Fight

Little black specks a mile in the sky
 Hang over the Plaza de Toros:
The buzzards come to be in at the death
 When the bull falls down before us.

They know the day and the very hour
 When the picador vaults from the ring
And the matador's blade will end the strife,
 And the bloody meal it will bring!

So "Viva el Toro!" so long as he lasts
 With the pitiless, torturing crew;
He's a braver beast than the scampering brutes
 Who at his heart and shoulders hew!

The Isle of Pines

Set the course for the Isle of Pines!

Pleasure place of the Pirate's play;
Here life's laid on pleasant lines
To make a Robber's holiday.

The Carib women have teeth like pearls,
The rum casks open wide;
There's joy ahead for the crew that furls
Its sails by the Island's side.

Bottle and barrel flow free for all,
Music and maids to dance—
It's open house at the Buccaneers' ball,
Where every beau has a chance!

Revel in silks and wantonness,
Scatter the jewels and gold,
Drown all your cares in drunkenness—
Remember we're growing old!

Finery and frills go with the game;
We're dandies until we are dead!
Moth and candle unite in the flame;
The future harbors no dread!

When purses have shrunk we sail in array
From the joyous Isle of Pines,
To fill them again on the great highway,
Then return to its gay confines!

The Calabozo

Bed of stone, and nothing to eat
Save what you buy of the rascal cheat
Of an Alcalde, who grinds the face
Of every prisoner in the place—

Coatless, shirtless, out at the knees,
Covered with grime, bitten by fleas!
Starve while you stay, die when you go—
This the doom of the Calabozo!

The Boucan

Salt and smoke and a turning spit,
These are the tools we ply,
Curing cattle into beef,
Making the red meat dry.

Shoot and carve from dawn till dark,
Winding the boucan over—
Not work for men of the nicest caste,
But fits the wild sea rover.

Matchlock and fork, and slave or two,
Cruising the wide savannah,
Bulls and porkers we gather in
To market in Havannah.

When swine and kine run low awhile,
Give pistol and cutlass play—
Pockets to fill on the ocean,
Instead o' this humdrum way!

Roncador Reef

Roncador Reef lies low in the surf
That curls on its coral edge.
It lures the ships to its black embrace,
And they break their bones on the ledge.

'Tis a pitiless port for missing barques,
Half hid in the seething tide,
Littered with plank of shattered craft
And the skulls of men who have died!

It reckons its wrecks by the double score,
This isle of the lost maroon,
Barren of green save for seaweed drift
Aglow in the tropic noon.

Sun and sea and sky combine
To blot out life from the rock;
The day orb glows like a ball of fire,
And at night the pale stars mock.

So sail to the south of Roncador
On the tack to Campeche Bay!
Widen the course beyond the reef—
Keep your keel off the cay!

Green Turtle

Callipash and Callipee—

King! here's a dish that's fit for thee!

Tender green fat from under the shell,
Stewed in its juice with some sherry,
Served while hot with anything—well,
Bring in the port and make merry!

Callipash and Callipee—

King! here's a dish that's made for thee!

Captain Avery

Cruising in the Indian Sea,
Captain Avery's fleet of three
Fell athwart the Mogul's ship,
Fitted for a wedding trip—
Princess fair of Pondicherry,
Journeying some Prince to marry—
Laden with rubies, diamonds, and pearls,
And more than twelvescore Hindoo girls!
Such a bevy and such a prize
Never gladdened a Pirate's eyes!
Dark-eyed maids of Trich'nopoli,
Behold what bridegrooms come to thee!

The Shark

Shovel-nose and hammer-head,
Alike they fatten on the dead!

Blue fins circling about the ship,
They lap the blood with an eager lip!

Buzzard on land and shark in sea
Always know where the fight's to be!

They scent the battle from afar,
And spread the tidings ill of war!

The Sea Wind

Saint Iago, send thee fair
 Wind of the Southern Sea;
Come to us gently, Air,
 Soft to the lee.

Not the harsh hurricane
 Hurled at the mast,
Driving to Bay Biscayne
 Before the blast.

These are the summer seas,
 Free from all harm;
West blows the pleasant breeze,
 Moistly and warm!

So shall we safely glide
 Into our goal,
Borne on the even tide,
 Behind the mole!

The Cayman

The Cayman lurks in the tropic swamp,
Buried in mud and slime;
He stretches his paws and tongueless jaws
When it comes his feeding time.

Beware ye then of his mighty bite—
When closed, it never lets go!
The Cayman dark on land is a shark,
A deadly, doughty foe!

Tender or tough, all flesh is the same
That falls to his fearful fangs.
He strikes with his tail like a giant flail
And endeth his victim's pangs!

The Atoll

Oasis in the desert depths,
 Circle of coral and pearl!
Roundabout the calm lagoon,
 Agirt with a silver swirl!

Raised by an insect seeking light,
 Which dies when it finds the day,
The barriers rise to the ocean's edge
 And with the breakers play!

Eden is here, and paradise—
 Slender and tall the cocoas stand,
Waving their long arms welcomingly,
 Rooted deep in the narrow strand!

To sea-sore eyes comes strange relief!
 Here, indeed, is Hesperides—
Rest at last from the combing waves,
 And hours of slumbrous ease!

The Sallee Rover

Swarthy Moors with glittering eyes,
Eager to grasp the luckless prize—
We who've sailed the wide seas over
Fall the prey of a Sallee rover!

Heathen hounds who would cut a throat
Lightly as we could scuttle a boat;
Better die now than die thrice over
Shackled slaves of the Sallee rover!

Lash and load are the fate one fears,
Sold in the market at Algiers:
Death near life doth always hover
In the path of a Sallee rover!

The Whale-Ship

Creaking masts and a rusty prow,
Greasy decks and shape of a scow,
Tattered sails and rickety ropes,
Cargo mainly of shattered hopes!

The whale-ship rolls in the tropic swell,
Likened most to a floating hell!
Hunting her prey in the glassy tide,
Chasing the sperm o'er the ocean wide!

Beef that's bone, and pork that's salt
As the sea that rolls 'neath the starry vault,
Biscuit like rock and duff like dough—
Nothing to do but to starve and row!

Years from home, years yet to stay,
Without a port to rest on the way—
Wearisome work for the weary crew,
Ugly and yearning for something new.

Longing in vain for the sunny isles,
The maids of Tahiti and their wiles!
Palms and pleasures no more for they
Who bind themselves to the whaleman's way!

Vale!

Skull and bones no longer fly—
Steam and screw the reason why.

Peaceful commerce goes its way,
Buccaneers have had their day.

Seas are safe from shore to shore,
Wild adventure rules no more.

We, unchanged, again would brave
Desperate chances of the wave:

Coal from the mine, not breath of sea,
Takes the ocean from the free—

From the bold who where they would
Wandered, took whate'er they could—

Man 'gainst man and gun 'gainst gun,
Heedless of another sun!

Yet the tale still lives, and will,
Carrying with it yet the thrill

Of fierce joy that reckless deeds
Rouse in the mind of him who reads!



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